

**STATE OF GEORGIA
COUNTY OF HENRY**

The Henry County Board of Commissioners held a Special Called Meeting *in-person* on Tuesday, November 28, 2023, at 3:00 p.m., at the Henry County Administration Building (Community Room), 140 Henry Parkway, McDonough GA. Henry TV also streamed this live online at its website, as well as Charter/Spectrum Channel 180 and Facebook Live. The *Henry Daily Herald* was notified of this meeting. Those present were:

Carlotta Harrell, Chair
Johnny Wilson, District I Commissioner
Neat Robinson, District II Commissioner
Dee Anglyn III, District III Commissioner
Vivian Thomas, District IV Commissioner
Kevin J. Lewis, District V Commissioner

Also attending: Cheri Hobson-Matthews, County Manager; Serena Nowell, County Attorney; Stephanie Braun, County Clerk and Jasmin Head, Deputy County Clerk

HENRY COUNTY CODE OF CONDUCT

(Sec. 2-2-128: Conduct during public meetings)

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge was recited.

CALL TO ORDER

Carlotta Harrell, Chair, called the Special Called Meeting of the Henry County Board of Commissioners for Tuesday, November 28, 2023, at 3:00 p.m. to order.

Discussion Only

Funds transferred to Community Development and ARPA Revenue Replacement Allocation (Presenter: Shannan Sagnot, Cluster Leader/ David Smith, Cluster Leader, / and Kevin Johnson, EMA Director.

Shannan Sagnon, Cluster Lead, presented a PowerPoint explaining homelessness and how it has affected our County. Ms. Sagnot reminded the Board of how the \$800,000 was transferred to Community Development. The Georgia Tech Master Class came up with a Hidden Homeless Report for Henry County this past spring. Prior to that report, the Board graciously authorized funding to assist those that were negatively impacted by Covid-19, and we accepted applications from nonprofits, faith-based organizations and small businesses within the County. Applications were reviewed and funds were allocated, but there were some remaining funds in the approximate

amount of \$800,000, and that is what will be discussed this afternoon. She had asked that the Board hold off on allocating these funds until we could receive the study back from Georgia Tech on homelessness, knowing that this is a concern for members of the Board and to ensure that those funds were being utilized for the most vulnerable in our community. Ms. Sagnot provided definitions for homelessness as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Ms. Sagnot stated that she sought the assistance of the Atlanta Regional Commission, and that they had funds available through their Community Development Assistance Program (CDAP). We applied for funding for technical assistance, and it resulted in a partnership with the Georgia Tech Master Class and paid for the study of Hidden Homelessness within our County. Ms. Sagnot explained that last year the County was able to put 60 individuals in hotels that cost the County approximately \$30,000.00. Ms. Sagnot envisions a partnership with Henry County, the faith-based communities, and nonprofits to set aside resources and a location where there will be a commitment for a short-term emergency shelter.

Kevin Johnson, EMA Director, came forward to announce warming shelters for the citizens of Henry County which will be open tonight due to the cold weather. Mr. Johnson stated staff met with some of the homeless community this morning and they are worried there are no resources available for them. He added that there are a lot of folks within Henry County that want to help, but it is a huge undertaking when you are talking about establishing a full-time shelter. When times like this arise quickly and the temperature drops suddenly without much warning, we need to act fast. He explained there will be four () different pick up site locations available in order to transport individuals to warming stations: one off 138; one near the hospital on Hudson Bridge Road; Red Hawk Park; and another location in Locust Grove. Mr. Johnson agreed that the need is much greater than simply sheltering them overnight when the temperature drops. He said staff is continuously reaching out, building relationships, and sharing resources, but staff also has to maintain day-to-day County services for the community. Working with the schools, they have over 1,200 students that are homeless. He stated that we need to start making some progress to deal with these much larger issues. Mr. Johnson and Ms. Sagnot have been working together to create a Community Resource Coordinator position. The position would be solely responsible for bringing resources together that are in the community and linking those with the individuals that are in need in Henry County.

David Smith, Finance Director, presented a financing opportunity from the American Rescue Plan Act. The County was allocated approximately \$45.5 million dollars from the treasury, a one-time fund that should only be used for one-time items and expenditures. They are working to obligate all of the funds by December 2024 and have them fully expended by December 2026. The allocation to date is approximately \$36.8 million. The allowable use of the recovery funds and the use of the Henry County priorities are Public Health Response, Negative Economic Impact, Water and Sewage Infrastructure, and Revenue Replacement.

Mr. Smith stated that Revenue Replacement includes anything that falls within the general fund category. The funds can be used like general fund expenditures. For Henry County, it was a reserve for emergency expenditures that did not meet any of the other categories. The funds were allocated to each priority: public health response received \$10.8 million, negative economic impact was 7.4 million dollars, intrastate was approximately 11 million, and revenue replacement was 5.5 million. As of November 2023, the funds not designated to specific projects amount to \$8.7 million dollars,

which has been spread across the Henry County priority categories. A survey conducted in 2021-2022 within the community asked how they want to see ARPA funds spent. The community response highlighted food/nutrition assistance, health/mental health assistance, utility assistance, finding employment, and broadband assistance. Small businesses in Henry County were looking for grants, low-interest loans, new employee or staffing assistance, a line of credit, existing employee retention, renewed access to customers, and no assistance needed.

David Smith presented a challenge and recommendation PowerPoint slide. The recommendation is to partner with local nonprofits and others to create resources where residents can get help for a number of needs. Mr. Smith stated that he is designating funds towards small business grants, providing assistance to households, and providing nonprofit grants. The initial amount is \$4.2 million dollars, with an additional \$800,000.00, bringing the total to about \$5 million dollars to address the need for homelessness and sheltering in place. Mr. Smith would like the County to maintain a reserve for emergencies.

Chair Harrell asked Mr. Smith if he could explain what the cash assistance to households means and who would be eligible. **Mr. Smith** has determined the eligibility criteria; he explained there would have to be a process in place working with Ms. Sagnet's team identifying the eligibility. The cash assistance to household are providing stipends for families. Its called a guaranteed income program its where people can afford the housing. In Henry Conty as we ran through our emergency rental assistance program we saw rents escalate from \$1,400.00 to \$2,000.00 a month. The eviction rates have increased in the County as well. This program that is recommended will help decrease the eviction rates.

Chair Harell asked about the nonprofit grants and what is the vision in regard to that?

Mr. Smith responded, saying the \$800,000 is not going to be sufficient to set up a program for a shelter. **Mr. Johnson** stated they have big plans. Long-term, he would like to work towards establishing a full-time shelter in Henry County, supporting nonprofits and faith-based organizations. As those organizations take the lead, the County will be able to support them both with finances and resources to get off the ground. The goal is to branch the coordinator position and build a team that will be out in the field, eventually turning it into a Human Service Department within Henry County. In the long term, they are working on sheltering and implementing a paramedicine program. The goal is to have a mobile care unit where they can go to homeless camps to provide medical care. There are plans in place; they just have to establish relationships, fill the position, and fund the places that need to be funded so that it reaches the citizens.

Chair Harrell stated that the County has a huge need for mental health services. She would like to see the County address mental health. There is a great need, and the jail is a substitute for not having a mental health facility, which creates a burden in the jails. A large number of the jail population are there because of mental health issues and have been involved in incidents that placed them there due to mental health challenges.

Commissioner Wilson asked if we have offered small business grants in the past. **Mr. Smith** responded by saying yes, we have offered money out of the general funds for small business grants that applied and qualified, but the County didn't extend all of those funds. Wilson asked how much

money was applied to the small business. Smith responded by saying approximately \$2.5 million dollars.

Commissioner Robinson asked if we are partnering with the cities when it comes to homelessness, and is that something the new position will bring to the table for everyone. **Mr. Johnson** responded by saying that would be one of the main priorities. Mr. Johnson explained that we have worked with the cities and everyone that is willing to work with the County.

Commissioner Anglyn asked if we have anyone in the nonprofit community that is willing to step up and make an investment in a homeless facility for our County. **Mr. Johnson** stated that there are some faith-based organizations that are ready to do so, but we struggle in Henry County with a large nonprofit base coming in and setting up shop here. Many of the nonprofits here work between multiple counties.

Vice Chair Lewis stated that we have a couple of organizations operating within Henry County: The Southern Crescent Sexual Assault Center and Child Advocacy Center. He asked if that type of organization would be eligible for some of the ARAP funds. **Mr. Smith** stated that would be an organization that would be eligible for those types of funds.

Commissioner Thomas's concern is whether the funds we have will be distributed properly or if the amount should be reduced. The small business grant process was managed internally because many small businesses are comfortable working with the staff instead of going to the chamber. The process of distributing the funds needs to be a more in-depth conversation. Distributing the funds before was the issue, not the money, because the County had the money. How are we going to help households not repeat the cycle when it comes to the cash assistance program? **Ms. Sagnet** responded by saying we have to find a way to break the cycle, and that will come with case management. The County is still striving to build partnerships to assist with education and training for households, while also providing services for childcare and job training to get people to a point of self-sufficiency. Commissioner Thomas stated that she hopes the application process will have some of the elements in place that Ms. Sagnet just listed.

Commissioner Thomas stated that the nonprofits here in Henry County want to work. The biggest problem is they have to find a way to pay something to the volunteers. She is hoping the money we set aside for nonprofits includes funds for employment as well. She stated that nonprofits can pay their employees, and they can pay themselves for services that are rendered for these needs. Commissioner Thomas asked if there has been a roundtable discussion with the nonprofit organizations to ask them what they can bring to the table and how we can maximize their impact. **Mr. Johnson** responded by saying they meet with most of the nonprofits on a regular basis.

Chair Harrell invited Craig Ogletree to step forward and provide the Board with an update on the activities of the courts and express any thoughts or needs they may have.

Craig Ogletree, Henry County Accountability Court, stated that the courts are working on addressing homelessness and mental illness. Everything the Accountability Court does involves mainly mental illness and co-occurring substance use disorder. They have been integrating some efforts with the Stepping Up initiative program. They are also working with the new 501c3, New Leaf Henry, designed to support the Henry County Accountability Court. Unfortunately, people

have been denied from the program because they are homeless or don't have transportation. This program is of keen interest because it will help if people have somewhere to go and live temporarily so they can get stabilized and on their feet. That would be a big win for the County and the court system.

Chief Michael Yarborough, from the Henry County Sheriff's Department, discussed the mental health situation they are facing in the jail. There has been about a 35% to 38% increase in mental health cases over the last year, requiring them to take individuals to the hospital and maintain that coverage. The mental health unit in the jail is currently at capacity. There was a 132% increase from last September to this September in those with mental health issues within our jail. When cold weather arrives, that's when the jail population tends to increase.

Commissioner Thomas asked about the ward that the jail has created. Are they able to separate those who need mental health assistance, and is it well-equipped to make it effective, or is it just a holding place? **Colonel Tina Daniels, Jail Operations Commander**, explained that the jail has created a mental health ward with the aim of concentrating acute mental health patients in one area for more hands-on treatment. While successful, it requires well-trained personnel, additional training, and adequate resources. The prolonged assignment of individuals to this area can be taxing on personnel.

Mark Amerman, Director of Public Safety, highlighted increased officer training regarding mental health. Officers are mandated to undergo mental health training to recognize crises. The jail has partnered with McIntosh Trial to provide an avenue for transporting individuals, allowing officers to spend less time on these cases. Additionally, a mental health clinician has been hired to assess situations before charges are brought, with funding from RedSpeed funds.

Commissioner Thomas inquired about funds for the Justice Department, seed money for the Stepping Up initiative/pretrial diversion. **Mr. Smith** responded that the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding is specifically one-time dollars. Discussions about the Stepping Up Initiatives program should occur during the fiscal year 25 budget discussion, as it involves current operating expenses. Some ARPA funding will go specifically toward mental health, and the jail has received assistance with its medical contract using ARPA funds.

Chair Harrell thanked everyone for their presentations and emphasized the need for continued collaboration to address mental health needs in the community. Commissioners were encouraged to reach out to staff with any questions or concerns. This item will be revisited in January as an action item for a vote on the disbursement of funds.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Henry County Board of Commissioners at this time, **Chair Harrell** adjourned the meeting. *Meeting adjourned at 4:33 p.m.*

Carlotta Harrell, Chair

Stephanie Braun, County Clerk